

Administration of Barack Obama, 2015

Remarks at a Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Fundraiser in New York City

November 2, 2015

Well, it is wonderful to be with all of you. Because this is a smaller setting, my remarks at the top are going to be very brief because I want to spend most of the time in conversations. There are a number of people I want to acknowledge, obviously starting with Jonathan and Jennifer, who are so gracious. Jonathan is being a little shy. The truth is that I think Jonathan and his family were one of the first fundraisers I ever held in New York City. I've had a lot since then. *[Laughter]* But they were early angel investors, and I could not be more appreciative of everything that they've done for me throughout my national political career.

There are a number of other people obviously I want to acknowledge, starting with somebody who is as tough and as clear thinking and been the best partner anybody could hope for in helping to move the country forward, and that is our leader, Nancy Pelosi.

I also want to acknowledge a number of other Members of Congress who are here—those of you who have not had a chance to meet Ben Ray Lujan, he is doing outstanding work each and every day in the thankless job of being out DCCC. Somebody who slipped the noose and was doing it before and is not anymore—*[laughter]*—Steve Israel. A couple of outstanding Members of Congress and part of your delegation: Carolyn Maloney and Jerry Nadler. I want to single out Jerry for his courage and tenacity and being willing to take some really tough votes, including our most recent push on appropriations.

Well, it's an interesting time. First of all, I think we should not let today pass without noting that I signed a budget today. Now, this is not everything; it's not all done. There are specific spending bills that have to be produced and delivered before the Christmas break. But the fact that we can anticipate going through the next year and a half without manufactured crises and without a weakening of the U.S. economy and ensuring that our national security is paid for, that our Medicare and Social Security are not damaged or cut back, that critical investments that are needed in education and basic research will receive some additional funding—that's a good piece of business.

And I wish John Boehner hadn't waited until he was leaving to decide to work with us on this, but I want to give credit where credit is due. I think that the Republicans worked with Nancy and Harry and the White House the way it's supposed to work. I am reminded—because I think I'm going to see Chris Rock over at the event we're doing in "Hamilton"—of Chris Rock's standup concert. Now, I can't quote him directly because—*[laughter]*—it's not family friendly. But there's a whole sequence where he starts talking about guys bragging about doing things they're supposed to do anyway. It's like "I take care of my kids." I mean, you're supposed to take care of your kids. *[Laughter]* "I haven't been to jail." *[Laughter]* You're not supposed to go to jail. *[Laughter]* There is an element of a low bar of passing a budget and making sure the full faith and credit of the United States of America is sustained.

But having said that, I think that's important. And this would not have happened had it not been for Nancy's incredible leadership and the unity that the Democrats showed throughout these budget discussions, including taking some tough votes on things like, for example, defense authorization. I just want to publicly acknowledge that.

Seven years have passed since I took office. There's almost no economic yardstick by which the American people are not better off than when we came into office. Over 13 million jobs. The economy growing in a sustained way for 6 years now—over 6 years. Seventeen million people with health insurance who didn't have it before. A doubling of clean energy production. A serious effort at curbing our carbon emissions. Real progress on education and college affordability.

Across the board, we can say unequivocally, if Ronald Reagan were asked the question, "Are you better off than you were 4 years ago, or 7 years ago?"—the answer is yes. But the reason this election is so important coming is, we have to be able to protect the gains we've made, and we all know that we've got so much work to do. We know that with just a smarter approach to infrastructure, that we could put people back to work right now and grow the economy significantly faster. And those are jobs that can't be exported and would set the foundation for us to continue to grow for years to come.

We know that if we were investing in early childhood education, that there are a whole bunch of young people who right now are unfortunately headed towards the criminal justice system, who instead would be headed for college and careers.

We know the urgency of climate change requires us to transition faster to a clean energy economy, and that if we're putting money into basic research around energy and addressing some of the efficiency issues in our economy, that we can grow faster and create jobs, and help to lead the entire—in ensuring the next generation has a livable planet.

We know that despite all the successes that we've seen with Obamacare, there's still a lot of gaps in coverage that exist, primarily because there are a lot of States that aren't taking full advantage of Medicaid expansion, but also because there's a lot more work that we can do in terms of improving quality and access, even as we keep costs low.

So our work is not done. And in order for us to make it happen, it's not enough just for us to elect a Democratic President. I will do everything I can to make sure that I've got a Democratic successor. But that Democratic successor is going to need a Congress that is working with the President to advance the values and causes that we care deeply about. Health care does not pass if Nancy Pelosi is not the Speaker of the House. We don't get Wall Street reform done unless we've got a Democratic Caucus who's committed to fairness and transparency.

Issues such as the one that Jonathan has been so passionate about—making sure that we're dealing in a serious way with campaign finance—we're not going to get that done if Mitch McConnell is controlling the agenda going into the Senate, because he said very explicitly that he considers that un-American and a terrible thing to do, putting any constraints on money in campaigns.

So, on any item that you care to think about here, having a Congress that is serious about the things that we care about is vital. And I know I'm preaching to the choir a little bit, but I just want to say this, and I'll close with this, and then I'll take questions. I need people to feel a sense of urgency about these congressional races. They're down the ballot. Typically, the races that are at stake are ones in swing districts. Not every Democratic nominee is going to have embraced your particular pet cause because they're trying to figure out how to manage a challenging political environment. And so you kind of lose track of them. But I tell you what, having Nancy Pelosi as Speaker makes a difference.

And one of the things that I've been proudest about over the course of the last several years, and nobody exemplifies that more than folks like Jerry and others who have taken some tough votes here. Democrats are politicians too. You've to worry about constituencies and polls and trying to get reelected. But we tend to pay attention to facts, and we tend to pay attention to evidence, and we actually listen to reason and arguments. And if it's something that is the right thing to do, even if it's tough politically, we do it. And the country is better off for it. And that kind of leadership has to be rewarded.

So I'm hoping that you guys feel that same sense of urgency that I do about this. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:44 p.m. at the residence of Jennifer and Jonathan Soros. In his remarks, he referred to Reps. Ben Ray Lujan, chairman, and Steven J. Israel, former chairman, Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee; former Speaker of the House of Representatives John A. Boehner; and Senate Minority Leader Harry M. Reid. He also referred to H.R. 1314, which was approved November 2 and assigned Public Law No. 114–74. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee fundraisers :: New York City.

Locations: New York City.

Names: Boehner, John A.; Lujan, Ben Ray; Maloney, Carolyn B.; McConnell, A. Mitchell; Nadler, Jerrold L.; Pelosi, Nancy; Reid, Harry M.; Rock, Chris; Soros, Jennifer; Soros, Jonathan.

Subjects: Congress : Bipartisanship; Congress : House of Representatives :: Minority leader; Congress : Senate :: Majority leader; Congress : Senate :: Minority leader; Defense, Department of : Funding; Democratic Party : Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Early childhood education programs; Education : Global competitiveness; Education : Postsecondary education :: Affordability; Education : Postsecondary education :: College opportunity, expansion efforts; Elections : 2016 Presidential and congressional elections; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies :: U.S. production; Energy : Carbon dioxide emissions, reduction; Environment : Climate change; Health and medical care : Affordability and costs; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers; Health and medical care : Medicare and Medicaid; Israel, Steven J.; Legislation, enacted : Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015; New York : Democratic Party events; New York : President's visits; Science and technology : Research and development; Social Security and retirement : Social Security program; Transportation : Infrastructure, national, improvement efforts.

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